

Prospect of Eco-Tourism in Upper Humla (A Case Study of Namkha Rural Municipality)

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Abstract

Tourism, as the world's largest and fastest-growing industry, holds significant potential for economic development and cultural exchange. Nepal, endowed with natural beauty and cultural heritage, has positioned itself as a prime destination for global travelers seeking tranquility and environmental conservation. In this context, eco-tourism emerges as a sustainable alternative, minimizing environmental impacts while promoting conservation and community development. Upper Humla, a region rich in biodiversity and cultural diversity, stands out as a promising area for eco-tourism development within Nepal. This study explores the prospects of eco-tourism in Upper Humla, focusing on its natural resources, cultural attractions, and the potential economic benefits for local communities. Using a descriptive and exploratory research design, data was gathered through surveys, interviews, and observations to assess tourist preferences, eco-tourism resources, and local perceptions. The findings highlight the unique opportunities and challenges in harnessing Upper Humla's tourism potential, aiming to contribute to sustainable tourism practices and regional development strategies in Nepal.

Keywords: Eco-tourism, Humal, iodiversty, rural economy, environmental impact

Introduction

Tourism is the largest and fastest-growing industry in the world. Another term for it is the "smokeless industry." People are becoming more and more interested in travel these days, visiting various cities and nations for a few days or weeks at a time. Particularly during World War II, tourism has gained popularity. It has to do with a nation's sociocultural, political, and economic circumstances. Nonetheless, travelers want to visit places that offer tranquility, enjoyment, and a safe atmosphere.

Nepal's tourism industry plays a significant part in the country's economy since it is one of its competitive advantages. The growth of the tourist industry has helped to improve the nation's balance of payments, create more jobs, and generate cash. Nepal has drawn tourists from all over the globe with its natural beauty and rich cultural legacy, including Mount Everest (the "Crown of the World"), snow-peak mountains, the birthplace of Lord Buddha (the "apostle of peace"), numerous lakes and rivers, etc. According to our late king Birendra, "Tourism, if cultivated properly, may help a country to earn foreign exchange as well as friends from across

the land sees helping to forge link of mutual understanding and appreciation for a better world of tomorrow." Consequently, the tourist industry is important to this Himalayan Kingdom and will shape Nepal's economy in the future (Upadhyay, 2005).

Nepal is a Himalayan nation that may be roughly classified into three natural zones: Terai, hills, and mountains. Every place and every season in Nepal is appropriate for tourists. The majority of visitors visiting Nepal take in the country's natural beauty, distinctive culture, and tranquility. Nepal is ranked among the top 10 ecotourism destinations worldwide. A wide range of activities are carried out under the eco-tourism umbrella. Nature walks, animal safaris, elephant rides, nature photography, camping, scientific research, jungle drives, mountaineering, river rafting/kayaking, canoe rides, sightseeing, tracking, and bird watching are popular activities among them (Dhakal & Dahal, 2000). It is increasingly acknowledged that ecotourism contributes to the financial resources needed for the preservation of environment and biodiversity. For these two reasons, eco-tourism is a desirable substitute for mass tourism in terms of sustainable development. One is that compared to mass tourism, eco-tourism has less detrimental effects on natural resources. Two, ecotourism-related activities can support community development, natural resource conservation, and the region's general socioeconomic advancement.

Humla is a popular hiking destination in Nepal's highlands, serving as the entry point to both Mount Kailash and Mansarobar Lake. The natural remoteness and biodiversity richness of Humla, along with its rich cultural heritage, offer ample opportunities for the tourism sector. It is a real, breathing museum that offers both domestic and foreign visitors amazing experiences. In particular, Humla has a lot of potential for the growth of ecotourism.

Potential Eco-Tourism Sites

Currently, Nepal's most popular tourist locations for sightseeing are the valleys of Kathmandu and Pokhara. These two valleys are ideal due to their natural beauty and rich cultural legacy. Chitwan's fauna has made it a popular tourist destination as well. Because Lumbini is the birthplace of Lord Buddha, it also draws a sizable influx of tourists each year. When it comes to trekking locations, the main areas that visitors visit are Annapurna, Manang, Jomsom, Everest (the region of Sagarmatha), and Langtang. It is generally desired that visitors be distributed more evenly throughout the nation. particularly to disperse tourism profits to other, less-traveled areas and to lessen the concentration and related effects in these areas. By doing this, tourism can continue to be relatively small-scale and match one of the ideal characteristics of eco-tourism (MOPE, 2004).

Other significant places in the nation, such as Antu Danda, Fikkal market, Pathibhara, Dhanusa Dham, Tansen, Khaptad, Devghat, Bishajari Tal, Upper Humla, and surrounding areas, have the potential to become ecotourism destinations. Other areas with potential for eco-tourism development have been identified by the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Project (TRPAP), and they are listed in the table below.

Table 1*Eco-tourism Development Sites*

Zone	Sites	Geographical Zone
Seti	Khaptad National parks	Hills
Karnali	Dho Rural Municipality	Mountains
	Poksundo Rural Municipality	Mountains
	Rara National Park	Mountains
	Simikot Rural Municipality	Mountains
Gandaki	Lwang	Hills
	Gorkha	Hills
	Bhujung	Hills
	Bandipur	Hills
	Nar and Phu	Mountain
Lumbini	Tansen	Hills
Narayani	Chitwan	Terai
Bagmati	Langtang National park	Mountain
	Bhardeo	Hills

Nepal has a vibrant and living past. In some isolated parts of the nation, shamanism and animism are still prevalent. Devotees' daily lives revolve on temples, shrines, monuments, and monasteries, where they burn butter lamps, sing hymns, ring temple bells, and play drums—all of which can be used to market tourism attractions. Despite its distant location, Humla offers a wealth of tourism attractions, including Simikot Valley, Kharpunath Temple, Humla Karnali, Raling Gompa, Chyachhara Waterfalls, the culture of the Khasa and Lama, beautiful lakes and mountains, etc. There are a lot of locations and industries with potential for tourism. Upper Humla is one of these locations, home to numerous landmarks and items that are well-known for their unique identities. There is a good chance that these resources will be used as a tourist attraction. Such a special location makes Upper Humla an excellent choice for ecotourism. The purpose of this project is to investigate Upper Humla's ecotourism potential.

The majority of the population in this region works in agriculture, and caravans are also very popular there. Because Upper Humla is home to a variety of flora and animals, including the uncommon blue sheep, red panda, gray wolf, and snow leopard, tourism has the potential to be a major source of income and employment in this area. A trekker's main draws to this area are the views of the northern portion of Saipal, Raling Peak, and Panchamukhi Himal. From Nepalgunj, travelers can fly to Simikot. Trekking from Simikot to Hilsa is another option; it serves as the entry point to both Kailash Parbat and Manasarabar Lake. It is now possible to travel from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, Simikot, Kailash, Khasa, Kodari, and back to Kathmandu.

Nature, Culture and adventure of this region are the issues of this study. Thus, the general research questions of this study are as following:

1. Why do tourists visit this area?
2. How Upper Humla can be eco-tourism destination?
3. Is tourism a income and employment generator?

4. What types of facilities can be provided to the outsiders (tourists).
5. Are the tourist products sufficient?

Objectives for the Research

The study's main goal is to investigate Upper Humla's potential for ecotourism. In addition, there are numerous more specialized goals, such as:

- a) Analyzing Humla's tourist arrival pattern.
- b) To learn about the research area's ecotourism resources.

Study Limitations

Only a limited area has been covered by the study. The study's primary goal is to investigate Upper Humla's ecotourism potential. The following are the study's limitations:

- The study on eco-tourism has only been conducted in Upper Humla; it has not covered all of Humla or tourism.
- Information is typically gathered from visitors, important informants, locals, and family members.
- Aside from tourism-related activities and goods, no other activities have been covered in this study.
- iv) The activities related to tourism after the field study have not been included.

Literature Review

'Eco-tourism' is defined as visiting relatively pristine or unspoiled natural areas with specific goals like researching, appreciating, and relishing the landscape with its flora and fauna, as well as any current or historical cultural manifestations found in these areas (Lascrain, 1987).

The term "eco-tourism" appears to have multiple meanings for different individuals. It denotes environmentally conscious travel to some. Others associate it with vacations in the natural world. Both of those things are part of eco-tourism, but it needs to go farther. It needs to be a force that keeps natural resources alive. Traveling through nature to promote conservation and sustainable development is known as eco-tourism. The concept of ideal tourism appears to have emerged from the emergence of ecotourism; terms like "must be" and "should be" in these definitions seem to reflect this intention. On the other hand, very little guidance exists regarding what constitutes an ideal scenario or how its development ought to be structured (Kunwar, 1997).

Aristotle is credited with starting the history of nature travel when he is reported to have visited the island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea and spent time researching the marine life there. During the 19th century, nature tourism was basically a visitor experience for breathtaking and distinctive scenery. It was also during this period that the idea of national parks was developed. The national park's founders intended to preserve the ecosystem, but visitors inside the park

supplied the political and economic justification required to turn ideals into reality (Lascurain, 1996).

When registering his firm, a Costa Rican tour operator developed the term "eco-tourism," which quickly gained popularity and was widely used in Costa Rican literature. Nonetheless, Hector Ceballos Lascurain's 1987 article providing a concept of eco-tourism helped to popularize and define the "eco-tourism phenomenon." Eco-tourism, according to him, is nature-based travel to comparatively untouched places with an emphasis on education. The 1989 Hague Declaration on tourist, which promoted national tourist management as a means of assisting in the preservation and conservation of the natural and cultural environment, officially acknowledged it at that point. Since then, academics, professionals, and businesspeople have been using the term "eco-tourism" more and more (Kunwar, 1997).

Ecotourism experienced a notable surge in the 1990s. Numerous nations have embraced and initiated eco-tourism initiatives. The International Year of Ecotourism was declared by the UN in 2002 in an effort to highlight the significance of ecotourism. Following 18 preliminary meetings held in Asia, Europe, and Australia, the summit ended in Quebec, Canada, with a 15-point declaration (MoPE, 2004).

It should come as no surprise that the concerned governments and local communities, aware of the economic advantages of tourism, started developing their own plans to maintain cultural and environmental sensitivity while generating much-needed revenue for their areas. As a result, ecotourism that is centered around communities evolved. Because of this, more recent attempts to define eco-tourism are adopting a holistic approach and acknowledging the local community's grassroots involvement in the industry's development and administration (Shrestha and Walinga, 2003).

Since environment and natural regions are intrinsically tied to tourism in Nepal, estimations suggest that nature tourism and eco-tourism account for around 80% of the nation's tourism industry. Similar to other types of tourism, ecotourism may also result in unintended sociocultural changes; nevertheless, there are positive examples of this occurring in Nepal, such as the Sherpa culture in the high Himalayan region and the Gurung culture in the middle and high hills. Thus, ecotourism can aid in cultural preservation if it is planned carefully (Shrestha and Walinga, 2003).

Although various profiles, books, articles, and reports have been written from here and about it, Humla remains a virgin place for investigation. However, no research has been identified thus far, specifically this study conducted in Nepal. Numerous reports from NGOs, the Periodic District Development Plan, Humla (F.Y. 2012/2013-2016/2017), and the district profile of Humla - 2070 have all demonstrated the potential for tourism in Humla. In particular, there is a lot of potential for ecotourism.

Of all the tour packages available in Nepal, trekking is considered the most captivating and daring. Unique trekking sites include the Annapurna circuit, the Khumbu region, Kanchanjunga, Rolwaling, Langtang, Simikot-Mansarobar, Upper Mustang, Dolpo, and more (Sharma, 2006).

Humla has an abundance of fragrant and therapeutic plants. The primary drivers of the district's tourism development are the district's varied climate, biodiversity, traditions, and culture. Humla is a special location for studying traditional culture, religion, and biodiversity. The months of April through September are the best times to visit Humla. According to DDC Humla / Eco-tourism Unit (2004), the district headquarters is also referred to as the entrance to sacred Mt. Kailash and sacred Mansarabar Lake.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study is designed to find out the prospect of eco-tourism in Upper Humla. A descriptive and exploratory research design has been used to analyze potentialities and resources of eco-tourism of this area. These research designs helped to interpret the qualitative and quantitative data and findings.

Universe and Sampling

The study's scope includes the rural municipalities that make up Upper Humla. Seventy-five households from the five rural municipalities most impacted by tourism were included in the survey. The head of the household participated in the survey in the majority of the households; however, in many circumstances, the other member was utilized as a responder if the household head was unavailable or if the other person was more educated and competent. Fifteen tourists were chosen as respondents from among those present in the area. Methods of accidental and purposeful sampling were employed in this investigation.

Nature and Sources of Data

Primary Data

This research study makes use of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered by field surveys and the use of a variety of data collection instruments, including questionnaires, interviews, FGD, checklists, and observation.

Secondary Data

Additionally, secondary data were gathered from relevant books, journals, publications, records of DDC and I/NGOs, administrative records, and other published and unpublished sources.

Methods and Tools for collecting data

Various methods and instruments were used for gathering different kinds of information and data based on their characteristics. The following are these methods and resources for gathering data:

Questionnaire

Questionnaire is used as a tool for data collection.

Interview

Key informants, including related and knowledgeable individuals, were also chosen for interviews in order to obtain accurate information.

Observation

To gather pertinent data for this study, field observation and semi-participatory methods were used. An important tool for determining the accuracy of the information was observation. During the field visit, their items, locations, people, and tourists were observed, providing a good image of this area and their activities.

Discussion in Focus Groups

Focus group talks were held in order to gather pertinent facts and knowledge. People involved in the tourism industry, gentlemen and generalists in society, social activists, and local leaders were chosen for this study. It has also provided a clear image of the research that backs up accurate data.

Methods of Presentation and Analysis of Data

Processing of the gathered data included coding, editing, and validation. The SPSS software was utilized for the analysis of the gathered data. Following processing and tabulation, the data were shown according to nature in a table, chart, and diagram. Data were presented and evaluated in relevant ways in this manner.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Eco-tourism Resources in Upper Humla

There are plenty of ecotourism resources in Upper Humla. The following list includes numerous mountains (Eco-Himal), lakes, rivers, waterfalls, hot springs, wildlife, vegetation, and temples and monasteries (cultural heritage).

Himalayan hidden gem, the Humla/Upper Humla Mountains (Eco-Himal)

Upper Humla in particular is a trans-Himalayan region. There are numerous mountains in Upper Humla, including Saipal, Chanla, Panchmukhi, Raling Peak, and others. If ecotourism were to flourish in these mountains and their surrounding area, they may become well-known destinations for mountaineering and hiking. Locals claim that Panchmukhi is a unique mountain with five peaks, Raling Peak is comparable to Machhapuchhre, the Chanla range is comparable to the Annapurna range, and Saipal (7030 m) is comparable to Mt. Everest of the Humla.

Table 2*Mountains of Upper Humla*

Mountain	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Saipal	21	28.0
Chanla	18	24.0
Raling Peak	16	21.3
Panchmukhi	16	21.3
Other Himal	4	5.4
Total	75	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Out of the total 75 respondent, Majority of the respondent, 28 percent said that Saipal Himal can attract the tourists than other Himal and 24 percent respondent said Chanla Himal/range can attract the tourists. Similarly, equal respondent (21.3 percent and 21.3 percent) said that Raling peak and Panchmukhi Himal can attract the tourists and remaining 5.4 percent said other Himal.

Lake and Rivers

Upper Humla is home to numerous gorgeous lakes, waterfalls, hot springs, and rivers. including Selima, Talung Lake, Chyachhara, Kermi Hot Springs, and Karnali. This region is home to more than fifty perennial rivers and streams. The best place for tourists to go boating, fishing, rafting or kayaking is Humla Karnali. The waterfalls in Chyachhara are a suitable location for Bunjy Jumping. Hot spring swimming is well-known at Kermi Hot Springs. Salima and Talung Lake are well-known boating locations. Thus, from a tourism perspective, other picturesque lake waterfalls, hot springs, and rivers are also significant.

Flora and Fauna

Upper Humla has a distinct flora and fauna and is located in the foothills of the Himalayas. It boasts abundant biodiversity. Because of this, the region is home to a wide variety of wildlife and medicinal plants, indicating that it may be a useful location for research and wellness. Experts in Ayurveda (healing) use a wide variety of medicinal plants as medicines; some are exported to other countries for commercial purposes. The tourists are also entertained by a variety of forest animals and birds, such as blue sheep, snow leopards, red pandas, bears, leopards, and panthers. However, we must use caution when hunting illegally.

Humla/Upper Humla is also well-known outside of Nepal for its extraordinary floristic and medicinal plants, such as Yartsagumba, Panchaule, Bhojpatra, Kutki, Jatamasi, Guchhi chyau, etc., that are uncommonly found in other parts of the world (see page 24 & 28). Ayurvedic medicine is growing in popularity these days in developed nations like the United

States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, etc. Thus, Humla/Upper Humla can quickly become globally famous for its (eco)tourism, which in turn can facilitate rural and community development.

Cultural Heritage

Upper Humla is an ethnic museum in action. Numerous tourists, both local and foreign, used to travel to this region to study social and cultural practices and traditions. It is also the location of numerous celebrations, sacred sites, and historical locations. Upper Humla has seen a rise in pilgrimages and cultural tourism thanks to the Kailash-Mansarobar trek.

Additional things for cultural history include the attire and ornaments of the Lama and Khasa people, as well as the area's friendliness. A lot of temples and shrines, like the Shiva temple, the Kharpunath temple, the Badhphala, Hilchha, Mastho, Kailash, Luwasur, Gura, and Kalasilta shrines, as well as gompas and monasteries like the Halji, Raling, Yalbang, Bimug, Tumkot, and Gompa, are fascinating places to visit and are rich in history. The significance of cultural heritage from a tourism perspective is displayed in the following table.

Table 3

Importance of Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritage	No. of respondent	Percentage
Festivals	19	25.3
Temple & Gompas	22	29.3
Clothing & Ornaments	12	16.0
Hospitability	16	21.4
Other customs and Tradition	6	8.0
Total	75	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Out of the 75 respondents, the biggest percentage, 29.3%, stated that temples (Madues) and gompas (monasteries) are more significant from a tourism perspective, while the lowest percentage, 8%, stated other customs and traditions. Similarly, festivals, attire and decorations, and hospitality were ranked higher from a tourism perspective by 25.3%, 16%, and 21.4% of respondents, respectively.

Major Tourism Spots in Upper Humla

Upper Humla is home to numerous tourist destinations that offer breathtaking views, a distinct cultural experience, and natural beauty. The majority of visitors come to this region to conduct research on a variety of topics as well as to hike to Mansarobar Kailash. In reality, Upper Humla is Shangri-La (Sambla), a place where travelers experience nirvana and forget the outside world. However, it lacks sufficient infrastructure, superstructure, and advertising, and

because of its distant location, tourists are unable to access or visit this place. There are several outstanding tourist destinations. A few of them are explained as follows:

Limi valley

To the north of Humla lies the isolated trans-Himalayan valley of Limi. It resembles a little Loangthang or Tibet in Humla. Three Lama villages make up Limi: Till is to the west, Jang is to the east, and Halji, the largest hamlet, is located in between on a narrow plain. Of all the Lamas in Humla, Limi is the only civilization where the monastic theocracy rules with an iron grip. Residents who misbehave or disobey are subject to harsh financial fines. Additionally, they follow a fairly rigid system of polyandrous marriage (Lama, 2002).

Limi is last mountain valley of Nepal where Tibetan pleateau ecosystem is found. It is covered by snow from November to April. There are many flora and fauna, lakes, streams, and gompas. Among them Talung Lake and Halji gompa is very important from the tourism point of view. Guest house is at Jang gompa which is specially for tourist, only 15 percent tourists visit Limi valley who trek to Kailash Mansarobar. It is also alternative route of Kailash route. From Labtsa shar pass (5018m), tourists can see Kailash view from Nepal which is very interesting and enchanting.

Halji Gompa

In the past, the Halji Gompa was the main gompa of the three village of Limi, and a branch was constructed in every village. Some years ago, this system broke down and every village now has its own monastery. According to the chronology of Halji (Waltse) Gompa, the previous monastery was constructed by the great western Tibet Buddhist translator, Rinchen Zangbo (985-1056). The gompa used to lie just above the village of Halji. Later, when it was damaged by fire, it was shifted down to the village of Halji. Formerly, it belonged to the Sakya sect, but later it changed to the Digung Kagyu sect, under the influence of Gyang Drag Gompa at holy Mt. Kailash. Its guardian deity is Abchi Chhordron. This gompa is the biggest and one of the oldest in Humla. The Halji Gompa venerates Drigung Lingpa as its main Lama, since it is a monastery of the Drigung Kagyu sect now. The reincarnation of Drigung lingpa now lives in Deradun, India and he had visited Limi in 1993 (Lama, 2002).

The area of Halji Gompa is about 10 ropani. There is also Buddhist museum and monastery where 60-70 monks are lived. In every February, Ramzot festival is celebrated in the Halji Gompa for a week.

Selima Lake

Selima lake is situated in Kermi, Khagalgaun Rural Municipality covering around 3 km area and situated at the height of 4570 m. It is very beautiful long lake which is below Nyalo pass (4990m). There are many pastureland, where mule yak, sheep, caravan are grazing. There is found wild animal such as snow leopard, musk deer, blue sheep etc and NTFPs. Selima lake attracts to the trekkers, it can be appropriate boating destination.

Chyachhara Waterfall

Chyachhara is lovely waterfall which is situated in Chyaduk, Kahgalgaun Rural Municipality at the height of 2350m. It lies on the way to Mansarobar Kailash. It is falling from about 200m height. It attracts the trekkers easily and can promote adventure tourism. There are also found many wild animals, birds and NTFPs.

Kermi Hot Spring

It lies in nearby Kermi village; here is stream of hot water. In origin place of hot spring, its' temperature is upto 105⁰C but the temperature is decreasing according to its length from origion place. People come in kermi hot spring from different parts of the Humla for bathing to cure their diseases likewise bath, gastric, scabies, waist paining etc. So, it can be ultimate hot spring bathing destination for tourists.

Yalbang Gompa

It is located in the Namkha Rural Municipality's Yalbang. This gompa is home to about a hundred monks and their guru, Pema Rigtsal Rempoche. This monastery was recently constructed to serve as a model for the Namkha Khyung Dzong monastery in Tibet, which is located west of the sacred Mount Kailash at the source of the Karnali River. The influence of the Nyingmapa Tersar (New Treasure) school in Humla began when Degyal Rimpoche of Namkha Khyungdzong Monastery began preaching Nyingmapa Buddhism in western Tibet (Lama, 2002). Yalbang Gompa also lies on the way to Kailash mansarobar where many tourists visit this gompa. In Mansir last, Bajraguru festival is celebrated for at least 10 days in this gompa.

Tumkot Gompa

The Sakyapa sect's principal gompa in Humla is called Tumkot. The single gompa was constructed in the thirteenth century. This region was built in the Tibetan manner using raw bricks and rammed earth, yet it is currently in very rough shape. All of Karnali and Humla were ruled by the Sakyapa sect, which had considerable power in western Tibet at the time. They also gain patronage from the Malla monarchs of the Karnali region. However, the Kagyupa sect eventually supplanted the Sakyapa, and it had an impact on the Karnali area. With the exception of three Limi villages and Tumkot Gompa of the Sakyapa sect, Humla is currently influenced by the Nyingmapa sect.

Due to the fearful Shugden guardian, the Yultshodun community continues its worship and Tumkot Gompa is also famous for solving legal problems in the Buddhist community of Humla (Lama, 2002). Shugden, the violent protector deity of the Sakyapa, is the reason Tumkot Gompa is so well-known. The Yultshodun people, who reside in the villages of Yari, Tumkot, Namkha, Chala, Yangar, and Yalbang, are the ones who own Tumkot Gompa. Their customs are strikingly identical to those of the Taklakot (Tibetan) people, and they even have cross-border marriages. These communities now revere the Tumkot monastery solely out of dread for the shugden deity; aside from that, Yalbang Gompa has a greater impact.

Simikot Valley

Simikot is a headquarter of Humla district. It is also highest district headquarter of Nepal which elevation is 2900 meter from sea level. Simikot valley is high mountain valley. It has covered specially two villages, i.e. Khadaka (*Tallogaun*) and Paubada (*Mathillo gaun*). Two saying is found in name of 'Simikot', one is because of production of more 'Simi' (beans) and another is Marulle and later, Kalyal king (*dynasty*) lived to the 'Kot' (up place) and used to drink water from 'Sim' (wetland) (Rokaya, 2006). So, it is historical land.

Simikot is a gateway to Kailash Mansarobar. There is no direct air service from Kathmandu to Simikot, so travelers generally have to fly via Nepalgunj, the regional hub on Nepal's border with India. Simikot is lap of Panchamukhi Himal. And, Simikot is situated on a ridge high above the Humla Karnali river and is surrounded by high snow-covered peaks. This small bazaar is also the district headquarter of Humla, which is literally the most remote district of Nepal. Dominated by the airport the town is divided into four parts. To the south of the airport stand government offices, schools, the district police office, a guest house owned by the District Development Committee. (DDC), and a few shops. The main bazaar area consists of shops and a bank. Airline offices are just north of the runway. East and northwest of the bazaar are two large settlements consisting of flat roofed houses inhabited by khasa (Chhetri) and by low-caste artisans (Dum). To the north of the civil aviation tower, on both sides of the trail that leads toward kailash, there are a few private campsites and guest houses. Hot-showers are offered by the Nepal Trust Guest House. It is at one of these campsites that the logistics of your trek will be taken care of. The facilities in Simikot are very rustic, but a huge battery of the solar panels northeast of the airport does supply the village with electricity for about three hours each night (Lama, 2002).

Simikot valley has lots of tourist spots such as shiva temple, Ghee stone, Munigada (cremating place), Ruined Marulle Kot (Palace), Mugra (Stone tap), Kalasilta Madu (temple) Badfala Madu, Gura Madu, Sap Pata Lagna (Girkhelna) Pastureland (Kharka) etc, which are ancient and historical. So, Simikot valley offers good sites for day's hike. From the lagna (2910m), Simikot valley view are very enchanting. People of Simikot have their own unique customs, tradition and culture which help to attract and learn to the tourists.

Shiva Mandir (Temple)

Shiva Mandir is situated in east southern corner of Khadaka, Simikot Valley. It is historic Hindu temple. It is made typically in Nepalese style which is as Pasupatinath temple of Simikot, Humla.

In past, Simikot was among four gompas for safety, these gompas were four corner of Simikot, i.e. east, west, north, south. Specially, these were gateway of Simikot village. Now a day these are damaged. In this way, people of Simikot had built shiva Mandir for peace, prosperity and safety. After made lord shiva Mandir, People of Simikot have not been ever facing famine, epidemic and great disasters due to god bless. Now, it has been renovation. Ghyu Dhunga (ghee stone) and Munigada (Cremating place) are nearby shiva mandir.

In Dwpar age, Bhimsen (Pandap brother) had thrown ghee stone in Holy Mt. Kailash from Jumla but it was crashed in Marghor Himal and then it had fallen in near shiva mandir. Nowadays people of Simikot worship this stone as god. The interesting matter is that this stone is automatically oily and smell of ghee is coming from this stone. Bhimsen primary school has established recently in near ghee stone. In Shivaratri and Tij, many people are gathering and celebrating these festivals in Shiva Mandir. Tourists and other people can observe a panoramic view of Humla Karnali River and Panchmukhi Himal from the Shiva mandir. So, one should not miss to visit this area for taking enchant and pleasure.

Nyinba Villages

Nyinba villages mean Buraunse, Bargaun, Torpa and Limatang where Lama Community are living. They have their own unique culture and Buddhist religious sites i.e. Raling gompa, Bibug gompa (Hidden Cave) etc. These sites and culture can win easily heart of tourists. Nyinba villages are very potential area for village/ Rural tourism.

Some distance to the east of Simikot lives a Tibetan Community called the Nyinba. They live in the area called Nyin, 'the sunshine valley of high elevation'. In Nepali, they are known as the Bara-Thapalya, the most advanced among the Thapalya stock. The Nyinba community consists of four villages - Tangshod (*Buraunse*), Barkhang (*Bargaun*), Todpa (*Torpa*) and Nyimatang (Limatang) - which stand at elevations between 9,000-11,000 feet and are all around half an hour to two hour's walk from each other. The village of Tangshod is situated in the west, near Simikot; Barkhang is in the south, Todpa in the center, and Nyimatang in the east, near the famous pilgrimage site, Raling Gompa. Nyinba society observes an eclectic mix of Thapalya and Khasa Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism. Every Nyinba village is structured like the mandala of the Buddhist bodhisattva Amitayu (Gnopo Tshepakmed), the Buddha of long life. The older generation of Nyinba males tie their hair like a single horn on the crown of their head. The Nyinba practice polyandry, in which brothers from a family share a common wife. The Nyinba have a very elaborate cultural heritage, complete with festivals where they show off their valuable clothes and ornaments. The main Nyinba festivals are Abimi (ancestor worship), Lasol (worshipping the village god), Mani festival (Preaching of Buddhism through drama), Losar etc. (Lama, 2002).

Raling Gompa

Raling Gompa is situated in the north east of Nyinba Valley, Bargaun Rural Municipality which is very old and historic Buddhist gompa. It lies also at the base of Mt. crystal peak (Raling Tutho). It is believed that Guru Rimpoche (Padmasambava) come to this area and meditated at the holy cave of Raling and then people of there constructed the Raling gompa in the early 20th century. This gompa was recently renovated by Nepal Trust.

Raling Gompa can be reached by 5-7 hours walk from Simikot. On the way to Raling gompa, we can see Nyinba villages, many historical gompas, Togra etc which also attract the trekkers. Raling Gompa is considered a very important pilgrimage site and a centre for all religious sects of Buddhist, Hindus and Shamans. It is also a holy site that caravans and farmers visit to get their wishes fulfilled. Moreover, it is known all over Nepal, because it is the place where the oldest Tamrapatra (copper plate inscription -1312 BS) in the Nepali khasa language

was found. It is the tamrapatra of Ashoka Malla, the king of Sija in Jumla of the early 14th century (Lama, 2002). Raling mela festival is celebrated in the gompa on the occasion of Jeth Purnima. At that time, people are gathered from different part of the Humla to see Raling Mela (festival).

Kharpunath Temple

Kharpunath Temple is a lord shiva temple, it is considered as rank of Pasupatinath, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Muktinath, but lack of advertisement and proper management, it is backward and going to ruin. It is the home and play ground of lord shiva and Parbati. So, it is very important from the religious, natural and tourism point of view.

Kharpunath temple is situated in nearby Karnali river, where can be reached by 2-3 hours walk from the Simikot. According to myth, lord shiva wanted to make Mt. Kailash and Mansarobar lake in this temple but crow was cried on the Raling Peak and Demon of Tokra disrupted him. And then he made Kailash and Mansarobar in Tibet. Some body says that there is big and long hole (Subway) from Kharpunath temple to Raling gompa but it is not proved. So, it can be topic of research. Hot water spring is also found nearby Kharpunath temple and bank of Karnali river. One can bath in hot spring to cure his/her diseases. In every Maghe Sanskranti, people of different part of Humla come there to celebrate Maghe Tihar

Dudhe and Lade Daha (Lake)

Dudhe and lade Daha are often situated in high pastureland where both lakes are found together in different few distance. These types of lakes are found in many places of Humla such as Simikot, Syada, Kharpunath, Raya, Lali Rural Municipality etc. Dudhe Lake is seen white like as milk and Lade Lake is seen black, which is fearful (fierce).

In this way, Mansarobar Lake and Rakshesh (Demon) lake of Tibet are also form of Dude and Lade Daha. Dude Daha is form of God. So, people used to its water for bathing but Lade Daha is form of demon. So, one should not go alone in this lake. Both lakes are very important from the tourism point of view.

Prospect of Eco-Tourism Development in Upper Humla

While Mount Kailash and Mansarobar are important tourist destinations, Upper Humla boasts abundant ecotourism resources of its own. Upper Humla's potential for ecotourism growth is influenced by a number of natural and cultural elements. Location, land form, climate, wildlife, rivers, lakes, scenery, etc. are examples of physical elements. Cultural elements include the environment, festivals, hospitality, customs and traditions of various community groups, etc. Furthermore, effective planning, advertising, and infrastructure all contribute significantly to the growth of ecotourism. The attractions of Upper Humla are displayed in the following table.

Table 4*Main Eco-Tourism Attractions in Upper Humla*

Attractions	No. of Local Respondents	Percentage	No. of tourist Respondents	Percentage
Natural Beauty	24	32.0	5	33.3
Eco-tour & trekking	16	21.3	6	40.0
Cultural Heritage	27	36.0	3	20.0
Other	8	10.7	1	6.7
Total	75	100	15	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

The primary eco-tourism draws of Upper Humla, according to 32 percent of local respondents and 33.3% of visitor respondents out of a total of 75 local and 15 tourist respondents, is its natural beauty. Trekking and ecotourism accounted for 40 percent of responses from tourists and 21.3 percent from locals. In a similar vein, 36% of local respondents and 20% of visitors claimed that Upper Humla's primary eco-tourism draw is its cultural history, with the remaining 10.7% of local respondents and 6.7% of visitors citing other eco-tourism features.

Major Problems of Eco-Tourism Development

Upper Humla is rich in nature and culture with its unique features and identity. But, there are a lot of problems associated with eco-tourism development. Especially, there is lack of good infrastructures and super-structure facilities and recreational (man made) facilities such as parks, swimming pool, bird watching, jungle safari, cultural program shows etc. If there would have been these facilities, more than more tourists will visit this area and eco-tourism will be developed.

Table 5*Major Problems of Eco-Tourism Development in Upper Humla*

Problems	Local respondent		Tourist respondent	
	Number	Percentage	Nmber	Percentage
Transportation & Communication	15	20.0	3	20.0
Lack of Information/ Advertisement	9	12.0	1	6.6
Accommodation Facility	11	14.7	2	13.3
Trekking route and tourist map	6	8.0	1	6.7
Health facility	8	10.7	1	6.7
Recreational facility	10	13.3	3	20.0
Trained manpower	5	6.7	1	6.7
Campsites	7	9.3	2	13.3
Electricity & drinking water	4	5.3	1	6.7
Total	75	100	15	100

Source: Field survey, 2024

Out of the 75 local and 15 tourist respondents, the majority (20%) cited a lack of transportation and communication facilities as the primary obstacle to the growth of ecotourism in Upper Humla, while 6% and 12% of the local and tourist respondents, respectively, cited a lack of information and advertisement. Similar responses were given by 14.7 percent of local and 13.3 percent of tourist respondents, 8 percent of local and 6.7 percent of tourist respondents, 13.3 percent of local and 20 percent of tourist respondents, 6.7 percent of local and 6.7 percent of tourist respondents, 9.3 percent of local and 13.0 percent of tourist respondents, and 5.3 percent of local and 6.7 percent of tourist respondents, who stated that the main issues are a lack of accommodations, a map of the trekking route, health facilities, recreational facilities, trained labor, campsites, electricity, and drinking water facilities. .. Thus, the majority of respondents who were tourists (20%) stated that the primary issue impeding the growth of eco-tourism in this area is the availability of recreational facilities. The main issues with Upper Humla's ecotourism development are illustrated in the accompanying figure.

Findings

In Nepal, tourism is a pivotal industry celebrated for its cultural diversity and breathtaking natural landscapes. Humla, situated in the northwestern part of Nepal, embodies this allure with its rich biodiversity, cultural heritage, and strategic location as a gateway to Mount Kailash and Mansarobar Lake in Tibet. Upper Humla, a specific focus of this study, holds particular promise for eco-tourism due to its pristine natural resources, including mountains, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, and hot springs. The area attracts tourists primarily for trekking, mountaineering, and cultural exploration, bolstering its appeal as a destination for eco-conscious travelers seeking adventure and cultural immersion.

This research, conducted through surveys and interviews with 75 local residents and 15 tourists, sheds light on Upper Humla's tourism potential and the challenges it faces. Despite its natural beauty and cultural richness, infrastructure limitations such as inadequate transportation and communication facilities pose significant obstacles to tourism development. Additionally, while eco-tourism is seen as a potential source of employment and economic growth, concerns exist about its potential negative impacts on local socio-cultural dynamics. Efforts to enhance infrastructure, preserve cultural heritage, and manage eco-tourism sustainably emerge as critical recommendations from the study to unlock Upper Humla's tourism potential while safeguarding its unique environment and community integrity.

Conclusion

As a smokeless sector, tourism has drawn people from all throughout the world. The phrase "the goose that lays the golden egg" describes tourism, which is both a source of money and an engine for job growth. But given the particular situation of Nepal, this view has to be critically questioned. The history of tourism in Nepal dates back more than 55 years. This business helps a lot of people, but it has never been presented as a means of promoting regional development. Hidden gem of the Himalayas, Humla is a live, open-air ethnic museum. Additionally, caravans, such as yak, sheep, goat, and mule caravans, call this place home. Despite the region's abundance of natural and cultural wonders, tourism has not grown as predicted. For Humla's tourist development, a few tourism-related initiatives had been carried out.

Since the Simikot Airport opened in 1978 and the Kailash route Even though tourists had already been to Nepal following the establishment of democracy in 1951, they returned to Humla later in 1993. There is some volatility in the trend of tourists arriving in Humla because of political unpredictability, a number of physical issues, and other factors including a lack of promotion, policies, plans, programs, an information center, and enough infrastructure. The majority of visitors came to Humla in order to hike to Mansarobar and Kailash. A few of them came to Humla for study, ecotourism, and hiking. The way visitors behaved toward residents was typical. The study demonstrated the abundance of ecotourism resources in Upper Humla. This region has a lot of beautiful mountains, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, hot springs, temples, and gompas. The study revealed that the Upper Humla region boasts several significant eco-tourism destinations, including Limi Valley, Halji Gompa, Selima Lake, Kermi Hot Spring, Yalbang Gompa, Tumkot Gompa, Simikot Valley, Shiva Temple, Nyinba Villages, Raling Gompa, Kharpurth Temple, and Dude and Lade Lakes. The majority of those surveyed stated that the primary ecotourism attractions in Upper Humla. The primary obstacles to the growth of ecotourism in this area were a lack of communication and transportation infrastructure.

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